

EXCERPTS

**STATE OF THE STATE OF EDUCATION**

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster



*The state of the state of education in Wisconsin is strong, but our best and most important work is needed during the challenging times ahead.*

*By remembering our history, how we established a legacy of quality education throughout our state, and prioritizing our efforts on our New Wisconsin Promise to close the achievement gap, together, we will, now, more than ever, shape the destiny of Wisconsin children and secure our future.*

**State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster**  
**July 18, 2002**

It is truly an honor to be here today, in our beautiful State Capitol, to report to the people of Wisconsin on the State of the State of Education and to issue a call for action to local communities to pledge to a New Wisconsin Promise that ensures a future of quality education for all the children of our great state.

### **CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE NEW WISCONSIN PROMISE**

Citizens of Wisconsin understand that the economic, social, and moral future of their communities will be determined by the next generation, by the goodness of their children and the greatness of their schools.

And so, our New Wisconsin Promise is to close the achievement gap so that all Wisconsin children, regardless of the color of their skin, the languages they speak at home, or the economic or educational level of their parents, have the opportunity to become productive citizens. By returning to our progressive roots, by coming together in community around our shared value and responsibility to put our children and their education first, Wisconsin will lead the way in truly leaving no child behind.

Closing the achievement gap must become our number-one priority, the economic engine for ensuring long-term security for our state and for our citizens. Now, more than ever, the future of our state rests with the present state of our children. We must pledge to the New Wisconsin Promise.

### **EQUITABLE SCHOOL FINANCE**

From our smallest school district, Dover, to our largest, Milwaukee, communities care deeply about their children and their education. And across the state, local governments and school districts alike face enormous challenges in meeting their constituents' needs in the face of rising costs, budget deficits, and stagnant revenues.

Indeed, the question of how Wisconsin funds its public schools, serving 900,000 students in 426 school districts and all communities throughout the state, is vitally important. Too important, frankly, to answer without engaging citizens and determining the values they believe the school finance system should reflect.

That is why I conducted community dialogues on investing in quality education in nine communities around the state. I invited citizens from diverse backgrounds to serve on discussion panels and welcomed members of the public to share their views.

Wisconsin's citizens expect the values of student equity, quality education, and local control to be reflected in how we fund our public schools.

Now, more than ever, an investment in quality education today ensures our long-term economic security tomorrow.

### **QUALITY EDUCATORS**

Student achievement rests with a quality teacher in every classroom and a strong leader in every school. Now, more than ever, a qualified educator can shape the future.

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

The New Wisconsin Promise ensures a finance system that provides access and equity to all students. In special education, we will pursue a number of initiatives at the federal and state levels. We must ensure access to excellence for children with disabilities and not pit the funding of regular education against special education.

### **SMALL CLASS SIZES THROUGH SAGE AND 4K**

We know what works. We must retain funding for SAGE. I commend the governor and the legislature for their support of SAGE and call upon them to again commit their support in the next biennial budget.

In the last few years, more Wisconsin school districts have begun offering early learning opportunities to four-year-old children in collaboration with their community partners. Wausau, La Crosse, and Milwaukee are examples of 4K programs that have seen exponential growth in access to services that promote the social and academic skills needed for school performance.

### **LIBRARIES**

The libraries of our state are an enormous educational, economic, and quality-of-life resource for our citizens. Wisconsin's public libraries and Wisconsin's public schools are partners in providing lifelong learning opportunities for our state's citizens. Just as a free public education is an integral part of our democratic society, so is free access to information through the public library.

When people of all ages make use of the public library, our society as a whole benefits. It is good public policy to do everything possible to encourage both children and adults to use the library.

### **CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

The new economy embraces intellectual capital and technological innovation and is global in scope. Young people today want to be engaged in their learning. They want the "hands-on" experience of the real world. We must expand the opportunities available in career and technical education.

The production technical youth apprenticeship piloted by Generac and the Mukwonago school-to-work consortium is not only a national education reform model but a corporate training model as well.

The benefit to the businesses that participate in programs like Generac's is not just the addition of extra workers but rather the development and implementation of a system to train an inexperienced workforce. Congratulations to this company and the many other companies throughout our state that have responded to the social conscience and moral imperative of a business to help transition the young people of the community to adulthood.

But, ask students who have seen success as a result of participation in extracurricular activities, athletics, the arts, service learning, school-to-work, and apprenticeship programs, and they will tell you that working with adult mentors in school and community activities builds self-confidence and establishes a direct connection between education and individual economic security and citizenship.

Now, more than ever before, students must be prepared to apply their knowledge and skills to work in the new economy.

### **MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR OUR FUTURE**

Leadership is never easy, not during the "good times" and certainly not in challenging times. We have to prioritize and make difficult choices. We must choose education, we must invest precious dollars, we must believe in young people and help them to grow. Today's decisions are investments that return dividends tomorrow.

### **IMPLEMENTING ESEA**

The No Child Left Behind Act offers an opportunity to engage in a collaborative process to ensure the empowerment of disadvantaged children and direct federal resources toward our neediest children. But, the Act comes with a windfall of requirements and not a windfall of new money, so we must ensure it does not become an unfunded federal mandate for Wisconsin public schools.